This gives a duration in captivity of at least 16 years 2 months compared with Phillips's record of 16 years 9 months as the full age of his example at the time of his report. But Phillips's animal was only 3 months old when captured as against mine being fully adult and sexually mature when first seen. Unfortunately I have no information of the previous history of my specimen, beyond its having been in captivity 'for some time'. In view of the known duration of life of the larger carnivores, the age of 16 years in any mongoose is remarkable, but must surely approximate to the potential limit, though the absence of obvious signs of senility at autopsy does not support this. The osteomalacia *may* be a senile condition, but dietetic inadequacy during war-time seems a more likely explanation in the absence of other senile changes.

Although at least nine other mongooses of several species were kept in my collection from time to time, no other survived so long.

It is to be hoped that a record will be kept of the particulars and fate of the example mentioned in Phillips's note.

The Zoological Society of London,
Regent's Park,
London, N.W. 8,
May 8, 1956.

W. C. OSMAN HILL,
M.D., F.R.S.E.

Reference

Phillips, W. W. A. (1954): Longevity in the Ceylon Ruddy Mongoose (*Herpestes smithii zeylanius*). *JBNHS,* **52**: 587.

[By a strange coincidence, the above communication arrived just when Mr. Phillips's second note was in the final stage of printing (Vol. 53: 468). In it he records the death of his mongoose at the age of approximately 17 years and 11 months.—Eds.]

3. STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF BATS

We were collecting bats (*Rhinopoma kinneari* Wroughton, *Rhinopoma hardwickei hardwickei* Gray and *Taphozous longimanus longimanus* Hardwicke) from a large cave at Barmer in November 1955 at about 11.30 a.m. with the help of butterfly nets. The animals were transferred to small cages, which were brought outside the cave. After a few minutes we saw about twenty *R. kinneari* swarming around us. They settled on a nearby rock and began squeaking loudly towards the cages. Thereafter some of them actually clung on to our cages containing the bats. They were forced to fly away, but to our surprise five more came down from the rock and clung to the cage, and some others to our bush-coats. The bats were again driven away from the cages, but another set of bats soon replaced them. Only after all the cages had been wrapped up in cloth did their 'attacks' cease.

As is well known, if a cave is entered and the bats disturbed, most of them will fly out, but soon return. It was the returning bats that reacted to their captured companions in this manner.

Dept. of Zoology,
Maharaja's College, Jaipur, ISHWAR PRAKASH
Jaswant College, Jodhpur,
March 10, 1956. S. C. SHARMA

4. RATS IN HUMAN DIETARY

We were camping in the jungles of West Khandesh Division and, while returning one cold evening in January around sunset in a bullock cart from the banks of the river Tapti after an unsuccessful Mugger hunt, my companion, a forest officer, and I espied a cheerful fire crackling in a nullah about 50 yards from the fire-line along which we were travelling. Hoping to catch some poachers redhanded with their illicit gains, my companion and I tip-toed to the spot to find an old man and a couple of young lads sitting comfortably by the fire and calmly chewing the cud of thought. Near the fire lay one large basket covered over with fresh green leaves.

They evinced no great surprise when thus we broke in on their tranquillity. However, when asked to open up the basket, they demurred. Our suspicions strengthening, we repeated that they should uncover the basket promptly, whereupon the old man did so and what a loathsome sight greeted our unbelieving eyes! The basket contained nothing but dead rats of varying sizes; big rats, small rats, middling rats, even small little squeakers, all together numbering about 50 and all recently singed over a fire without even the trouble of having their intestines removed. There they lay, as if living in death, with bloated stomachs and glazed eyes, their greyish white skin shining smooth under the fire light as all the hair had been scraped carefully away. It was enough to rob us completely of our keen appetite for dinner.

This party, who belonged to the Kathodi Bhil tribe, averred that rats were a frequent item of diet on their otherwise meagre menu. However, when asked to eat one in our presence, they declined. Then, they went on to explain to us the 'modus operandi' of rat-catching. When they come across what looks like a promising rat-hole, they dig deep and wide around it, widening its mouth. Then a piece of rag soaked in a little kerosene is lighted up and put therein, and a basket lined with green leaves is used as a cover on top. This causes the smoke to go underground in the winding tunnels and the rats, on getting the smoke or smelling something afire, make for the nearest exit. But men are already posted there and on the rats emerging finish them off with their sticks. If any agile rodent eludes the men with sticks, then it meets its fate at the hands or rather the canines of their pet mongrel, and we saw several such rats which bore on their bodies the marks of canine teeth. Sometimes, these men use the expedient of flooding out the rats, if a source of water like a nullah or river is handy.